

third dimension

'A meaningful experience comes when the students realize their commitment'

Diversity characterizes volunteers

By Liz Crumley

Wanted—Volunteers, to serve as counselors for criminals on probation, to serve as a companion for an elderly person, to be a friend to someone small.

All of these programs need people, according to Lincoln's two volunteer bureaus.

And these represent the "new look" of volunteerism, according to Deb Bacon, administrative assistant to the coordinator of the Volunteer Bureau of Lincoln.

"It used to be that volunteer work meant just correlating a newsletter or working on a hospital aid," Bacon said.

"Now people want to get out and have volunteer experiences that are deep and more meaningful," she added.

More difficult

"With the economy the way it is, it's going to be more and more difficult for men and women to get a satisfying job that pays well," she said.

"I would advocate volunteer work as a choice and alternative for women, men and children to get experience."

Volunteers also get valuable training, she said.

"I see it as being a step in a paid career," Bacon said.

The Community Involvement Services (CIS), UNL's student volunteer bureau, also provides students with valuable job experience, according to CIS assistant coordinator Jane Costigan.

One such program is Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA), Costigan said. VITA provides income tax assistance to students and low-income community members, she said. Training begins in January and the project operates from late January to April 15.

VITA is valuable training for business majors, she said.

Extension of education

"These people see those jobs as an extension of their education," Costigan said.

"However, a good student volunteer experience comes about whenever he or she realizes their commitment," she added.

About 75 per cent of students in CIS do volunteer work for class projects or credit, she said. These classes are mainly in Human Development and Educational Psychology, she added.

"We feel we're not reaching the student who volunteers for volunteer's sake," she said.

CIS has a bulletin board in the Nebraska Union listing jobs available to students. Interested students can apply at the bureau, Costigan said.

The Volunteer Bureau of Lincoln serves as a clearing-house for community services in Lincoln, Bacon said, adding that it operates on an intake and referral system.

An agency wanting volunteers fills out a job description form at the bureau. Then the bureau interviews and screens volunteers and refers them to the agency.

The interview system also is used by CIS, Costigan said.

The interview and screening is done for the benefit of both the agency and the volunteer, according to Bacon and Costigan.

Jobs based on interests

The jobs are filled based on interests, skills and talents of the volunteer. The interviews determine these interests, Costigan said.

After the referral, the volunteer is affiliated with the selected agency, she added.

However, both bureaus sent monthly "check-ups" which the agencies fill out. These determine the house a volunteer worked and ask the agency evaluative for comments.

Bacon said that in 1974, volunteers from the bureau worked more than 18,000 hours.

Questionnaires work to the advantage of the volunteer, Bacon said. The majority of comments are good, she said, and can be used in determining future volunteer work and on job applications.

If a volunteer quits, the agency is asked to determine the reason, Costigan said.

Job dissatisfaction is the most common reason for quitting, she said. This can happen when the job description is not specific enough, she added.

In one case, a volunteer sent to a nursing home for occupational therapy, ended up wiping tables, she said.

However, this rarely happens, she added. Surprisingly, she said, a lack of time is infrequently given as a reason for quitting.



Photo by Ted Kirk

"Once a person starts a job, they usually make time for it," Costigan said.

Bureau involves 70 jobs

About 325 students have been involved in CIS this semester, Costigan said. She added that the bureau works with about 35 different agencies and 70 different jobs.

The budget for the bureau is \$5,200, Mary Dean, CIS coordinator said. Student fees provide \$1,000, \$4,000 comes from interest and assessment income from the Student Activities fund and about \$200 is from donations.

According to Jack Guthrie, coordinator of the Center for Students and Organizations, the assessment income comes from a service fee that is charged to all student organizations banking through Student Activities.

Banking through Student Activities is required for all student organizations, he added.

This fee is one-half of one per cent on all deposits an organization makes, he said.

The interest income comes from interest on investments made on these deposits, which goes back into student organizations, he said.

The Volunteer Bureau of Lincoln has 77 active agencies and 400 active volunteers, Bacon said.

The bureau is funded completely through United Funds, according to Bill Putnam, Executive Director of the Lincoln Community Services office.

The 1975 budget is \$19,700, which is one per cent of the total United Funds allocations, Putnam said.